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X.—FOUR HITHERTO UNIDENTIFIED LETTERS
BY ALEXANDER POPE¹

I

Button's, Monday, November 12, 1722.

A short Defence of two Excellent Comedies, viz. Sir Fopling Flutter,² and The Conscious Lovers; in answer to many scandalous Reflections, on them both, by a
5 certain terrible Critick, who never saw the latter, and scarce knows anything of Comedy at all.

A FABLE.

There lay in the Road
A venomous Toad,
10 A fine Drove of fat Oxen stood by;
He swell'd and he spit
His Venom, but yet,
Their Beauty, or Size, he cou'dn't come nigh.

Sir,
15 If you approve of what I now send you, and think it worth publishing, perhaps you may hear from me again.

¹ These four letters appeared in *The St. James's Journal*, now extremely rare, on the following dates:—Thursday, Nov. 15 (No. xxix, pp. 172, 173); Thursday, Nov. 22 (No. xxx, p. 178); Saturday, Dec. 8 (No. xxxiii, p. 197); and Saturday, Dec. 15, 1722 (No. xxxiv, p. 201).

² In response to *A Defence of Sir Fopling Flutter*, John Dennis, 1722, in which Dennis answers an old paper of Steele's in *Spectator* 65, declaring that even at that early date Steele had written to prepare the way for his fine gentleman of *The Conscious Lovers*. Dennis's *Remarks on a Play called The Conscious Lovers, a Comedy*, and *The Censor Censur'd in a Dialogue between Sir Dicky Marplot and Jack Freeman* did not appear until 1723, and after these letters.

No Writer, I think, can be more unlucky, than he who sets out with his *Head* (for I scarce believe the Critick has a Heart, or, at least, 'tis an odd Composition) full of *Malice*, and *Spleen*: To a *sensible Reader*,
5 it appears at once, and consequently lessens his Opinion of the Author; nor is it any use to the latter: on the contrary, it overcomes Reason; but, now for the *Heautontimoureumenos*.³

Our *Critick*, at his setting out, declares, he'll not
10 only make Remarks on *Comedy in general*, (which he has with a vengeance) but, that his *Pamphlet* shall also contain just Remarks on the *last new Comedy*, which he then had *never seen*.

Pardon this Digression; but, I think, I need not in-
15 form you, I'm not writing this for *Fame*, because I'll keep myself *unknown*, (not that I'm ashamed of my Cause, tho, I own, indeed I may of my Adversary) my *Profits* are evidently *none*. Why do I write it then? Why, as *Sir John Suckling* says, in a Prologue, "I
20 write it 'cause *I've nothing else to do*." I don't know, but I may be guilty too of an *unworthy* Piece of *Charity*, for twenty to one but the *Critick* will scribble an Answer, and so get a *Dinner*. But, if I should ever trouble you again, it will be no Answer to him, I as-
25 sure you: but, perhaps, general and particular *Remarks*, on *Plays* and *Actors*: since, I happen to be part of the Audience, almost every Night.

Our Critick, thro his whole Preface, rails at the *good-natur'd*, *worthy*, *short-fac'd Knight* ⁴ and the
30 three *Managers* of the Theatre, (Which Places they

³ Apparently a mistaken (intentional or unintentional) reference to *The Conscious Lovers*, really based on the *Andria*. Steele had sentimentalized the *Heautontimoureumenos* in *Spectator*, No. 502.

⁴ Steele. The italics are always those of the author.

have gain'd, by near *thirty Years* indefatigable labour and Industry, and the kind Disposition of our *beloved Monarch*, who is for rewarding Merit of *All Kinds*: But, I dare not say any more of that *Great King*, and
 5 *Good Man*, of whom I can never say enough. He pretends to lay open the secret Arts, by which this Play succeeded. 'Tis true, as I have heard, it was read, before Representation, to several Persons of *Quality*, of nice *Taste*; and many *excellent Judges* thought it
 10 worth their while to be at the *Rehearsal*, in a Morning, and all jointly approv'd of it. But, poor Man! (if it were not the nature of the Beast, I could pity him) his Modesty, notwithstanding, couldn't prevent his contradicting the whole Town. As to Advertisements being
 15 publish'd in favour of it, to forestall Approbation; no one can imagine it was a Friend who wrote 'em, since it might have prov'd fatal, to raise the Spectator's Expectations too much: but, People of Sense took 'em right, and the Play happen'd to have *Real Merit*, as
 20 has appear'd by *Throng'd Audiences and loud Applause*.

I can't help being shock'd, to find his *Gracious Majesty* is mention'd, among such a Heap of Scurrility. Oh! but our bloody-wise Politician, forsooth! finds out, that learning, and the Lord knows what, is running to
 25 Ruin, by the Mismanagement of some sordid Wretches, as he is pleas'd to call 'em.

Their Avarice is plain, from the Expence they have lately been at, for *new Habits, Clothes, Scenes, &c.* and to *adorn the Theatre*. But, alas! Authors are discourag'd, and these insolent Fellows won't act the
 30 Tragedy of *Coriolanus*, murder'd from *Shakespeare*, by the *Ingenious Mr. D*—: tho he has, with no less ridiculous Pains than Venom, rail'd at 'em, in an odd Dedication, to their Patron my *Lord Chamber-*

lain, and (to shew his Sense, Good-Nature, and Gratitude, to those, who, too often, have been his Benefactors) told the Town, they are Rogues and Rascals. Oh Lud! who can avoid laughing? Besides, Cloudy forgot, in a Postscript to his late Pamphlet, to inform the Town, that he lately sent a Letter to Sir R—— S—— (as I have been since privately inform'd) wherein, with much good Manners, he threatens the Knight, with *violent Remarks* on his *new Comedy*, unless his Plays are acted. Oh! to be sure, they can do no less. But, for Authors being discourag'd, I believe, the whole Town would be glad if the number of our new Plays were less, and the good old ones reviv'd in their stead: I fancy, the Actors would be glad to have it so too.

15 Sir, lest I now swell my Epistle to too great a Bulk, I'll conclude for the present; but, if you approve my Design, I shall pursue it against your next Paper, when you may expect to hear from your constant Reader ('tis old to say Admirer, but I am so).

20 Townly.

II

Button's, 18th Nov. 1722.

To the Author of the St. James's Journal.

Sir,

If you are not so intirely taken up with the Affairs of Politicks, as to have no leisure for the Business of us Idle People, Pleasure; my Correspondence, such as it is, is at your service. You must know, Sir, that I profess *Poetry*, and if that were a Science anything were to be got by, I might by this time have been worth a *Pomegranate*; but as things are otherwise ordered,

30 you see I write to you upon the blank Leaf of a Book, which I bought Yesterday, but have not yet paid for.

I observ'd in your last Paper, one of your Correspondents, in the Title of his Letter, promis'd us a short Defence of the *Conscious Lovers*; but it seems afterwards utterly forgot it, and diverted us with his
5 Severities upon the *Old Critick*, and his Panegyricks upon his good Friends (as I suppose 'em) the *Triumvirate*. Now, Sir, you are to understand I am a Person above all that, and as I have thought myself concern'd to see the Representation of this Comedy more than
10 once, I present your Readers, under favour, with the following Account of it.

To begin with the Fable (according to Method) 'tis form'd upon the Model of *Terence's Andrian*. Some Parts of it are little more than a Translation, and so
15 verbal too, that you cannot but recollect the very Words of the *Roman* Poet; which make the *English* appear faint, and insipid by the Comparison, which, I believe, otherwise would not. The Introduction of Women into the Drama, has accommodated it somewhat to our
20 Stage, though the Character of the Aunt is not of absolute Importance to the Design, any more then *Simberton's* and some others. Davus, by being turn'd into a Modern Footman, entertains you; but is not of that consequence to his Master's Designs as in the Original.
25 The Incidents are pleasant, those of disguising the Characters particularly have a chearful Effect. That of the Bracelet is not at all necessary and seems somewhat absurd in this part of the World now-a-days. As for the *Characters* and *Manners*, if there are not
30 many such in real life, (I mean of the principal ones) 'tis pity. They appear at least very gracefully, I believe, in the opinion of the most Profligate. That there are some such Characters in the World is very certain. I think the Poet has very well shown that the Splen-

dour and Shine of high Life is not at all eclips'd by the Honour and Innocence of it. The tender, and at the same time prudent Concern of old *Bevil*, for his Son's Interest and Satisfaction in Marriage, is very well hit; 5 so is the filial Fondness and Duty to the Father with the Struggles of Love and Generosity to the Lady. The entertaining Qualities of the Lady are well express'd by the Author, and represented by Mrs. *Oldfield*. The Honesty of an old Servant has been better 10 hit by this Author in his first Dramatic Work. The Character of *Tom* is a good Satyr enough upon our modern Fine Gentlemen, and at the same time a pleasant Representation of what passes in that low Life, tho' perhaps there is somewhat too much of it; and 'tis 15 to be discern'd, that this Character receives its greatest force from Mr. *Cibber's* admirable Representation. I doubt *Simberton* is a Coxcomb not to be found often in the world, any more than a Good-natur'd Old Maid. As for a learned Lady, the World is full of 'em; it is 20 no new Character, which indeed is hardly to be expected.

The *Sentiments* seem to be pretty much borrow'd from other of this Author's Writings. They have always somewhat striking in them, which those of other 25 Men have not. Those about Duelling have been most distinguish'd in the Conversations about Town. If they have tended to explode this Practice, 'tis very well; and if they have not, 'tis not much the worse. They who generally fall by these Engagements are a 30 sort of Ill-bred People, as careless how they give offence to others, as they are impatient under it themselves: so that the loss of them ought not to be considered of such ill consequence; especially considering them as Sacrifices to Good Manners, and while the News of

these Rencounters is fresh in Conversation, other People are used better during the Suspension of Valour.

It has been said of all this Author's Comedies, that the language is not well adapted to Conversation: how
5 far this is true of the *Conscious Lovers*, will be better determined when it appears in Print.

Our Author has long been Famous for the *Morals* insinuated and express'd in his Writings. His last Comedy suffer'd extremely upon this very account, as
10 he tells us himself; and 'twas thought a *moot* Point whether this would not have been as unfortunate, for the same reason. I can't however, reconcile myself to a great part of Squire *Simberton's* Conversation; some of which has since been omitted: nor did I think it at
15 all of a piece with those Rules, which our Knight has frequently laid down, relating to the Entertainment of a polite Audience, and Circle of Women of Honour. Neither is the exposing the Infirmities of Old Age, and the Impediment of Speech, very reconcileable to his
20 Doctrines of the Dignity of Human Nature; which, according to him, is sacred and honourable, even in its very Imperfections and Blemishes.

I do not at all meddle with the Probability of his Plot, nor shall enquire how the Parties came to be so
25 well acquainted with the *Characters*, and yet did not know the *Persons* of their own Council; and how it could happen in Probability, that *Simberton* should never have seen his own Uncle before, nor two or three more Queries of the same nature.

30 The Author of this Comedy has certainly more Merit, as a writer, than any Man now alive, and the whole Nation have been oblig'd to him for Entertainments intirely new, and for very many Hours of Pleasure which they would never have known without him.

His Wit seems now to flourish anew, to blossom even in old Age. He must always be agreeable, till he ceases to *be* at all. And yet I know not how it is, but whether he has been too liberal of his delicious Banquets, and
 5 cloy'd us with the rich Products of his Fancy, it has been almost Fashionable to use him ill: Blockheads of Quality, who are scarce capable of Reading his Works, have affected a sort of ill-bred Merit in despising 'em: And they who have no Taste for his Writings, have
 10 pretended a Displeasure at his Conduct. If he had been less Excellent, he might very probably have had more Admirers; as, if he had been less devoted to the Interests as well as the Entertainments of the Publick, he might have been at more Ease in his private Affairs.
 15 I am,

Sir, Your Reader, and Humble Servant,

Dorimant.

III

Button's, Dec. 3, 1722.

To the Author of the St. James's Journal.

Sir,

20 I begg'd a Place in your Paper some Time ago for some cursory Remarks upon the *Conscious Lovers*. That Comedy, it seems, expired upon the 18th Night; tho' it appear'd to the Town, that it might have flourished some Time longer, if, upon other Considerations,
 25 the Players had not thought proper to give it a violent Death, without waiting for its natural Expiration. But if this was no Force upon the Author, we, of the Audience, have very little reason to quarrel about it; most of us being, I believe, by that time, ready for
 30 some other Entertainments. This Play has since appear'd in Print, and is to pass a more dangerous Pro-

bation now than ever. The Industry, the Address of the Actors appears no more; the Habits, the Scenes, the Lights, the Musick, the Company, all the little Baits and Subornations of good Humour and Applause, 5 where are they? A Reader who lolls in his Closet, and is out of humour with the wet Morning, will take the liberty of being sullen and peevish, and industriously dissatisfy'd. He will expect to find the same Humour in the Stile, which struck him only in some 10 particular Action: He will look for the *Wit* of such or such an applauded Expression, which the Author perhaps finely intended for a Piece of plain simple Drawing after Nature.

The Author seems, in his Preface, to be well aware 15 of all this Disadvantage in the *Closet Representation*; and so ought every just Reader to be too. He then proceeds to the Incidents in the fourth and fifth Acts. The former of these I have already considered. The other, I mean, the tender Scene upon the Father's discovery of his Daughter, has received the most reason- 20 able and natural applause of eighteen successive Audiences, their Silence and their Tears. A Pleasure built upon the most sincere Delight, which no sensible Mind wou'd exchange for the momentary *passant* Transports 25 of an inconsiderate Laughter. An Applause which a Masterly Writer prefers to a thousand Shouts of a tumultuous and unreasonable Theatre. Some of our best Comedies, *The Fool in Fashion*,⁵ *The Lady's Last Stake*, *The Careless Husband*, have wound up their 30 Catastrophe in this tender manner with great Success,

⁵ Three of Cibber's sentimental comedies; the first is more commonly known as *Love's Last Shift*. They appeared in 1696, 1708, and 1704.

and never-failing Applause. And our Author has done well, not to descend to a particular Defence of this delightful Scene against the Cavils of Criticks, who, as he rightly observes, *are got no farther than to en-*
 5 *quire whether they ought to be pleas'd or not.*

I have the honour, in the Name of all the minor Criticks, to thank our Author for submitting his Song to our Censure and Examination. Tho' for my own part I must own, having had the good luck to get a
 10 Copy of it some time before the Play was acted, I have taken the Liberty to set about this great Work long ago, and have already with vast Pains and Application, got through the better half of the first Line. But finding the Work grew upon me, and my Printer very care-
 15 fully representing, that a private Man ought not undertake so great a Task, without the Commands of a Prince, or the Encouragement of a Subscription, I shall decline the further Prosecution of this Design, unless perhaps I now and then at my leisure spend an Hour
 20 or two for my own Entertainment upon the latter part of that delightful Line—*With downcast Looks a silent Shade.*

Some Wags have been very jocose upon the Manner of Expression, at the beginning of the last Paragraph
 25 of the Preface, where the Knight seems to be surprised that any thing Mr. Cibber has told him should prove a truth. But leaving this lively Generation to themselves, who are always most pleasant upon the gravest and most important Subjects, I beg leave to observe
 30 upon the Author's Translation of *Terence*, that tho' he might very well value himself upon it, yet the best Translation must in our Language be forc'd and unentertaining, especially upon the Stage, where the Audi-

ence cannot avoid recollecting and comparing it with the Original. *Terence's* Beauty, as well as *Horace's*, consists chiefly in the Happiness of Phrase and Expression; and even the Man who understands both
5 Languages perfectly, will miscarry when he attempts to translate either of those Writers into ours.

The Revival of *Philaster* was an Attempt that deserv'd more Success than it met with: The natural Rise of the Distress in that Play, that Simplicity of Passion
10 in the young Maid, with the many fine Passages throughout, pleas'd every one who has a just Taste of those Entertainments; and notwithstanding the Success of the *Conscious Lovers*, the Town are certainly ne'er the better Judges, while that Piece of *Fletcher* is acted
15 to an empty House. The Spirit and Clearness of Mr. *Wilks* was a true Satisfaction to the Audience, at the same time that they must consider him as a Person long devoted to their Service, and now no longer a young Man; and that whenever they have the misfortune to lose him, he will leave no Heir of his excellent Talents behind him.

The Play of *Alexander*, the Great is a better Burlesque upon Tragedy itself, than that which passes for a Burlesque upon *Alexander*, is upon that Play. I
25 must not omit doing justice to the Merit of a young Man who represented the principal Character; he is of very great Expectations in that Profession, and would certainly discharge a more reasonable Part with greater Satisfaction to good Judges, as well as more
30 Ease to himself.

I am, Sir, Yours,

Dorimant.

IV

Button's, 12 Decemb. 1722.

To the Author of the St. James's Journal.

Sir,

I Hear several People have thought fit to quarrel⁶
with me for my opinion of *Philaster*, which I shall take
5 an Opportunity to justify as to the Fable, Sentiments,
and Diction, when I have nothing better to entertain
you with. I take notice, that several of my gloomy
Brethren of this Coffee-House, are not able to compre-
hend whether I am a Friend or an Enemy; whether
10 I am heartily in the Interests of the Theatre, or else
am secretly growling over some old Grudge, which I
don't care to own. At present I shall only declare
that a Dramatic Piece finely written, and justly repre-
sented, is, in my opinion, a most reasonable Entertain-
15 ment, and is capable of being made a very useful one;
but that the Reputation of my Understanding ought to
rise or fall at *Button's* Coffee-House, just as my Sub-
ject happens to lead me to censure or commend the
Transactions of the Neighboring Stage, is certainly
20 very unjust Usage of your Humble Servant,

Dorimant.

P. S. *The following lines have been
in good Reputation here, and are now
submitted to Publick Censure.*

25 If meaner *Gil—n* draws his venal Quill,⁷

Who would not weep if *Ad—n* were he!

⁶ There are no other letters in the Journal concerned with these matters.

⁷ These lines are printed in this their original form in Pope's Works, Elwin and Courthope, Vol. v. Corrigenda, p. 445. For their final form, see *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, lines 151-214.

POPE'S AUTHORSHIP CONSIDERED

The four letters here reprinted from the *St. James's Journal*, with the exception of that part of the postscript to the fourth constituting the earliest known form of Pope's caricature⁸ of Addison, have received little⁹ or no consideration. They have been taken at their face value as merely so many darts hurled by two among the many undistinguished combatants in the scurrilous word-play of the day. But certain peculiarities in the fourth letter strike even a casual reader: the circumstances of the anonymous publication of these satirical verses, the place at which the letter is dated, and the wording of the postscript itself.

The verses were known to exist by at least one of Pope's friends prior to this date, for on February 26, 1721/2 they were mentioned in a letter by Bishop Atterbury,¹⁰ who asks the poet for a complete copy; but that Pope should *unintentionally* allow the most brilliant bit of satire he ever produced to pass out of his control, seems, to say the least, improbable. That, had he done so, he should forget the piracy, or have occasion to hazard the false date of

⁸ Although Mr. G. Aitken pointed out in *The Academy* (Feb. 9, 1889) that this famous satire had appeared first in print in this journal on Dec. 15, 1722, the old error started by Pope and revised by Curll (*The Curliad*. London, 1729, p. 12) to the effect in its final form that it had appeared first in *Cythereia*, 1723, is still repeated in such authoritative works as Professor Lounsbury's *The Text of Shakespeare* (N. Y. 1906, p. 300) and *The Cambridge History of English Literature* (1913, Vol. ix, iii, p. 87). Mr. Courthope's reasoning based on revisions in the various versions is also invalidated (Pope's Works, Elwin and Courthope, III, pp. 231 ff. See also v, p. 445).

⁹ See *The Life of Richard Steele*, G. Aitken, London, 1880, II, p. 284.

¹⁰ Courthope, III, p. 231.

1727¹¹ again seems improbable. If, however, he had been free in his exhibition of these lines, indecent so soon after the death of Addison, it seems little short of preposterous that it should have been to one of the devotees of Button's, the Coffee House of Addison, Steele, Philips, and Tickell, that he should have committed them. The last point immediately conspicuous is the absurdly improbable statement made by the publisher of these lines "that they have been in good Reputation" there at Addison's favorite Coffee House, among the survivors of his "little Senate."

These considerations almost inevitably give rise to the suggestion of how pleasant it would have been to Pope to fasten the authorship of this libel upon one of Addison's own disciples; it is *Alceste* and the filthy book all over again. The inconsistencies are at least sufficiently surprising to justify one in following back this series of letters of which these verses by Pope are the conclusion, to see whether or not they themselves throw any light on the author and Pope's responsibility in the matter.

The first of this remarkable series is devoted primarily to an attack upon John Dennis, the critic, who figures as the "venomous Toad"¹² in the clumsy fable at the head.

¹¹ In defense of himself, Pope laid the blame for the first publication of these verses upon Curll (1727), who retorted that they had already appeared in 1723 (*Curliad* as above). It seems inconceivable that this attack on Addison from Button's could have remained unknown to Pope, or the publication of his verses, if piratical, have been forgotten. If they were published without his connivance, here was his complete exoneration; if not, he had every reason to ignore this 1722 edition.

¹² It is hard to imagine Pope writing this fable, but conceivable in an assumed part. At all events, Dennis in his *Reflections, Critical and Satyrical, upon a late Rhapsody called an Essay upon Criticism* (1711) had called Pope "a hunch-backed toad." That was not too long before for *Pope* to remember and retort,—"Toad in your teeth, Mr. Dennis."

Incidental to this vehement arraignment is a eulogium of "the good-natur'd worthy short-fac'd Knight,"¹³ Steele, the three Managers of the Theatre, and the King himself,¹⁴ at once so incoherent, so equivocal, and so fulsome as to pass the bounds of credulity as a sincere endeavor. Certainly it is hard to see anything but studied ambiguity in such passages as: 237, l. 28-p. 238, l. 5, p. 238, ll. 14-20 (See also p. 240, l. 6).

Over and above all the absurdities of this letter, which seems calculated to bring into ridicule every person mentioned, no less those praised than those condemned, there are two sentences in particular that may be of some significance. The *dinner joke* as applied to Dennis early in the letter (p. 237, ll. 20-23) may have been a commonplace, but at all events it figures in the second of those verses by Pope quoted by Dorimant (applied to Gildon), and was evidently in Pope's mind at this time. The second passage comes near the end of the letter (p. 239, ll. 11-14), and sets forth Townly's belief that no harm were done in discouraging authors, and decreasing the number of new plays, so that the good old ones were revived. This passage is hardly that we should have expected from such an enthusiastic defender of Steele's latest production. Furthermore, and especially, this is the very line of argu-

¹³ "short-fac'd" may have been a fairly common epithet for Steele, but it does not seem to occur in that pamphlet by Dennis which Townly is answering. He is therefore introducing a gratuitous sneer into what purports to be a defense. Only in the later *The Censor Censur'd* (1723) does the expression "Mr. Short-Face" occur, and there but once (p. 4). In the earlier pamphlet, it is always, "Sir Richard," or "the facetious Knight."

¹⁴ The irony is apparent. As to Pope's attitude toward the King, in *Remarks upon Mr. Pope's Translation of Homer*, Dennis had called Pope an enemy of his King, Country, and Religion. Sir Leslie Stephen in his life of Pope observes (p. 85), "Pope's references to his Sovereign were not complimentary."

ment adopted by *Dorimant*, ostensibly a different writer, to add a final touch of disparagement to his review of the admittedly successful *Conscious Lovers* in a succeeding letter (p. 246, ll. 12-15).

The most ridiculous feature of this first letter is, however, that while it purports to be a defense of two plays, the writer carefully abstains from making any critical comment on them whatsoever. He further promises, if his first letter is printed, to contribute again. Notwithstanding this fine offer, he completely disappears from the scene, but in his place appears one *Dorimant*, who writes the promised critique, taking as his point of departure the failure of his predecessor.

If the former writer were ambiguously fulsome, the second assumes a judicial tone, beginning as one who rather grudgingly is compelled to admit imperfections. If the writer had set out definitely "to damn with faint praise," he would not have proceeded differently. So subtly veiled is the author's use of delicate suggestion and equivocal sarcasm, that at the end of the letter the reader may hardly be aware that he has been presented with a catalogue of all the weaknesses and absurdities malice could hope to find. So nearly a verbal translation of its Latin original is the play (p. 240, ll. 12-18) that reminiscence makes the "English appear faint and insipid," which, adds the writer in a conciliatory tone, otherwise he believes would not. Very gently does he sneer at the "Characters and Manners" (p. 240, ll. 29 ff.). The sentimental scenes are touched upon with apparent praise. One of the finest bits of characterization, which it would have been unsafe either to censure outright or to pass over he disposes of with the utmost adroitness (p. 241, ll. 10-16). Similarly Steele's sensational lines on dueling are made no great matter (p. 241, ll. 25 ff.). So also touching the dialogue and plot, the writer strikes.

yet feigns to withhold his hand (pp. 242, ll. 3-6; p. 242, ll. 23-29). Probably no better illustration of the left-handed way in which this writer doles out praise, and his remarkable talent for fixing a sting in the tail of a compliment can be found than the passage at the end (p. 242, ll. 30 ff.) in which, while apparently lauding Steele to the skies, he points out the disagreeable fact that it has become fashionable to abuse him, and touches upon his troubled private affairs. These could hardly have been brought in for any other purpose than to serve as a well-calculated sneer.

In the next letter, the writer continues his assumption of impartiality, but with less consistency. He admits that the audience is glad to have the play withdrawn (p. 243, ll. 27-30), and while exhorting the reader to be fair to the play under the more trying examination of the closet, suggests that it cannot so well endure this. In particular, he animadverts upon one of the "tender scenes" (p. 244, l. 18-p. 245, l. 1) with an apparent delight which can not fail to be held suspect on the part of the admirer of Terence and the older drama, supporting his eulogium by reference to *three of Colley Cibber's sentimental comedies*. According to his wont, however, he does not leave this praise without its scorpion's tail; for, to clinch the matter, he gravely quotes from Steele's own preface a passage which here sounds like anything but sense (p. 245, ll. 1-5), and immediately proceeds to open ridicule of that preface and Steele's song (p. 245, ll. 6-22). And now at the end of his review proper, like the writer of the first letter, he falls to disparaging Steele by a reference to the older drama (p. 246, ll. 7-15).

Apparently these criticisms were taken too seriously to please the writer, for in a third letter (fourth in the series) he voluntarily lifts the cap and reveals the wolf

(p. 247, ll. 1-20). The ambiguous character of these letters, which we have been tracing, had puzzled also "several of my gloomy Brethren of this Coffee House," and left them uncertain whether the writer were a friend or an enemy "secretly growling over some old grudge." The writer snaps his fingers in their faces and proceeds to print the satire on Addison.¹⁵

Such is the series of letters ending in the publication of the satire which Pope had probably written a considerable time earlier: one signed "Townly," which, taking a flying shot at Dennis (Pope's old enemy, and the unconscious occasion of Pope's original quarrel with Addison), tends to make Steele ridiculous by a fulsome and incoherent eulogy, and which, by failing to do what it sets out to, opens the way for another attack; and three, over the name of "Dorimant," which no less subtly conceal their malice beneath suggestion and an assumption of judicial fairness. Both writers succeed in an attack upon Steele; both, although assuming different points of view, agree in the use of insincerity, both agree in the method in which, as a last stab, the current drama is placed below the older. The last writer has in some way become possessed of Pope's most splendid satire; the former used a turn of speech occurring in the second line of this passage: nothing is proved (proof, in the nature of things, can hardly be looked for) but much is suggested.

In the light of what has been said and a careful reading of the letters themselves, it will readily appear that:— 1) the last three letters are a hoax of some sort; 2) the first, absurd in itself, affords the approach for these;

¹⁵ Compare Pope's conduct relative to a travesty of one of the Psalms the publication of which he tried to disown. Lounsbury, *The Text of Shakespeare*, pp. 204-205.

3) the irrelevancies are no more than barely sufficient to support the character we conceive the writer to have assumed; 4) the perpetrator of the hoax was an enemy of Dennis, Steele, and Addison (an admirer of Cibber?), had Pope's unpublished verses, felt authorized to "submit them to public censure," and manifests throughout a point of view readily consistent with what it known to have been Pope's.

The situation at the time was this: Pope had this satire, which he knew was superb, by him. He had feared to publish it during Addison's life time, and common decency forbade publication so soon after Addison's death.¹⁶ Steele and the whole Button crew moved his spleen every time he thought of them. Steele wrote a successful play, admittedly successful. This irritated him still more. Little was to be gained by the saw and cleaver method of Dennis in defiance of popular approval. Here was a chance for a little fun with the "short-fac'd knight."

Whether a malicious desire for fun first led Pope to write the preposterous letter which opens the series, and from which, as not affording the most advantageous point of attack, he shifts to the posture of a second contributor; whether it was only at the end of this hoax, as an after-thought, that he tacked on his verses, seeing here an excellent opportunity to produce them in safety and put off a joke on his old enemies: or whether he concocted the whole scheme as a stalking horse behind which he could accomplish his original purpose of publishing these lines, can hardly be determined. Knowing Pope's inveterate fondness for chicanery, that he "could not drink tea without strategem," recalling his similar trick in the case of

¹⁶ At a considerably later period these verses demanded a defense. *Curliad* as before.

Philips's Pastorals, when his letter ¹⁷ of feigned commendation deceived Steele himself, and considering all the imposture, falsification, and trickery that was shortly to attend the production of the *Dunciad*, one could find even the latter view conceivable; and the verses actually are the culmination of the series.

Only on the ground that they are by the same hand, and that, Pope's, are these four letters entirely intelligible; but admitting Pope's authorship, they become as clear as day, their purpose, their inconsistency, their sarcasm and cunning. Satire of this sort, when not "the oyster knife that hacks and hews" is sometimes difficult to identify, but these letters seem almost as clearly akin to the essay in the *Guardian*,¹⁸ as the Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot is to *The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace* (Imitated).

M. ELLWOOD SMITH.

¹⁷ *Guardian*, No. 40.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*